EXPLORATIONS

technoculture

Youngsters a threat to obsolescent grown-ups

Did you see "Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman" on the tube the other Sunday? Kids on drugs taking over the city with technology. Yikes!

Lex Luthor, the consummate bad egg, hired some wayward neuroscientist to design drugs to increase brain power. After a few hits, the kids became junior Einsteins. They could do whatever they wanted — from taking over the television networks to turning the water supply green — and no one could stop them. The adults were basically powerless.

J. GREG PHELAN

I'm not one to glean an inordinate amount of wisdom from the tube, but it does tend to reflect our fears pretty well (for proof watch "Beavis and Butthead"). This episode of Superman's adventures covered all the bases, dramatizing the insecurities of us grown-ups who are living in a time when technology has fundamentally changed the world since we were kids. We never had multimedia PCs, word processors or Power Gloves back in the good old days. Does it make things different? You bet.

VCRs didn't exist when I was young, but my 2-year old niece, Jenny, has seen the video of "Beauty and the Beast" probably a hundred times. It makes me wonder if she is going to grow up to become a cartoonist, a ballroom dancer, or just to have a pronounced affection for Disney memorabilia.

I had no Nintendo, either. As soon as Jamie arrived at his grandmother's yesterday, he turned on the video game box, and soon was frozen in front of the TV.

"Hi, Jamie, how is kindergarten?"

Beep, pop, beep.

"Boring," he said, finally.

No wonder. It probably was boring compared to the continuing adventures of Super Mario. All this technology, the saturation of media, the mounds of visual information surging through these little brains — will it change them, give them the upper hand over we technologically impaired adults?

The smart kids on Superman used their high-tech skills to take over the city. Leave us alone, they said. We don't need you adults any more. Give us an island and a million pounds of gooey bears and get lost. They even installed a citywide video surveillance system to make sure they wouldn't be bugged.

In the real world, it was much the same. The outbreak of computers, video machines, and other electronic gadgets was bad enough, but the changes in biotechnology remain the most formidable of all. Back when we adults were playing kickball, it wasn't possible to design a new drug. Doctors now are so sophisticated they are creating synthetic substances to mimic chemical activity going on in the brain. Drugs to make you more intelligent are not that far-fetched. In fact, there has already been a marketing push to sell controversial drugs to improve memory, learning and other brain skills.

And if that scientist who has been studying Einstein's brain for 40 years figures out what makes it so different from yours and mine, who knows what's next? Boost-Your-SAT cocktails, or Remember-Your-Spanish Margaritas? What happens when your child grows up after years of cognitive supplements in her Cheerios? It might double her IQ, but it would definitely put a strain on dinner conversation.

"Sorry, honey, but I never did understand relativity." Or:

"No, really. I swear I don't have even one alternative theory to the Big Bang."

Well, at least on TV, Superman saved the day. The smart drugs wore off, the kids became kids again, and the evil scientist was caught. Now if only Lex Luthor would stop buying up media conglomerates, there'd be nothing to worry about.

☐ *Greg Phelan, Fair Haven, is a technology specialist working in software design and computer education. He holds a master's degree in computer science. Technoculture appears Sundays.*

you can *with beakman and jax*

Dear Jax,

How do you make ice cream?

Tiffany Robinson
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Dear Tiffany,

Ice cream is one of those wonderful weird things you get when you mix different forms of matter (stuff) together. Different forms, like a *solid* suspended in a *liquid* – paint. Or a *liquid* suspended in a *solid* – Jell-O. We call these weird and wonderful things colloids (CALL-oyds).

Ice cream is *gases* (air) suspended in frozen *liquids* (fats and milk). It's made by whipping in air *while it's being frozen.* That's what an ice cream freezer does – whips in air at the same time it's freezing.

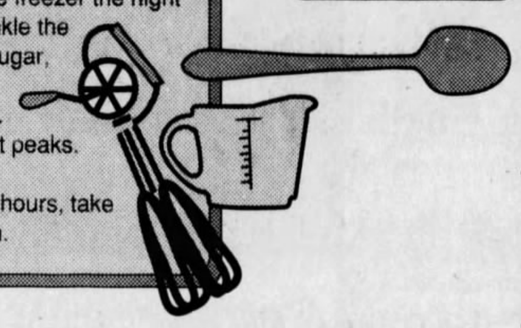
You Can make an excellent ice cream by whipping in the air *before* you freeze it. Today's experiment is like a recipe. Get some family help and permission.

Jax Place

experiment #1

WHAT YOU NEED: 2 envelopes unflavored gelatin - 1/4 cup water - 3/4 cup milk - 3/4 cup sugar - 1/2 teaspoon vanilla - 1/4 teaspoon salt - 3 cups whipping cream egg beater - shallow metal baking pan

WHAT TO DO: Put the metal pan and the egg beater into the freezer the night before you do this. All your tools have to be really cold. Sprinkle the gelatin onto the water. Soak it for 15 minutes. Mix the milk, sugar, vanilla and salt until blended, then stir in the gelatin mixture. Pour into the cold pan and place in the freezer for 1 1/2 hours. With the cold egg beater, beat up the cream until it forms soft peaks. Beat chilled gelatin mixture. Fold together both mixtures. Put the pan and the egg beater back in the freezer. In 2 or 3 hours, take them out and use the egg beater to whip the ice cream again.



SO WHAT:
You just made still-frozen ice cream. *Serve it immediately* because it will just turn into a block of sweet ice if you try to freeze it again. The big deal with regular ice cream is whipping air into it while it's being frozen. You need an ice cream freezer to do that.

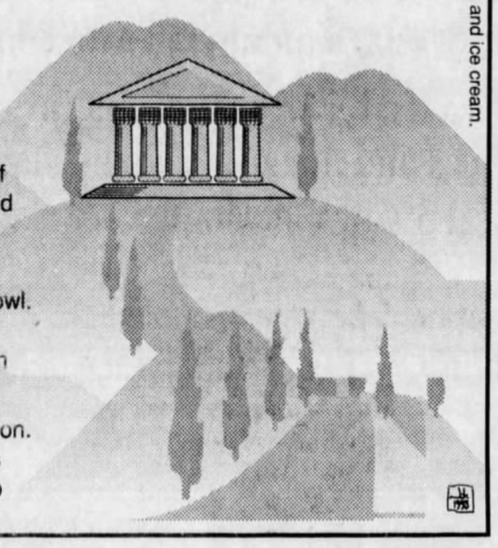
A Little History

Thousands of years ago, ancient Romans invented lots of stuff. Things like: Latin, bureaucracy, circuses, road building, and putting those fancy, flowery curlicue things on top of elegant Greek columns.

They also invented ice cream. Slaves had to run from the city of Rome up into the Alps – a range of mountains – to get snow and run back with it.

Everyone had to work quick because in ancient times, there weren't any freezers. Cooks took the snow and placed it in a bowl. They made a little crater in the top of the pile and stirred in a mixture of cream, sugar and a flavor. We'd use vanilla, although Romans used anise or mint.

The problem with snow ice cream in the modern world is pollution. All the poisons we spray into the air from our cars and factories make snow ice cream a lousy idea because it's really difficult to find snow that's clean enough to eat.



P.S. from Beakman: Here are 2 words to look up in a dictionary: *obsessed* and *obese*. Both of them might have something to do with you and ice cream.

© 1993 Universal Press Syndicate 11-7-93 Recycle this newspaper!

How to understand the alien language of the computer nets

■ A complete glossary of essential networking terminology and common abbreviations.

By J. D. CONSIDINE
THE BALTIMORE SUN

OK, so you read all that stuff about how Internet was the place to be, and decided to fire up your modem and log on for yourself. But now, after weeks of net surfing, you've noticed that hackers have a lingo of their own — and I don't mean C language. So here are a few terms you need to be conversant with before making the leap from lurker to net.personality.

ASCII — American Standard Code for Information Interchange; the 128-character standard used by most computers. See also "smileys."

bandwidth — Originally a technical term referring to the amount of data per unit time (told you it was technical) a computer or transmission line can handle, netters use it as a general description of net traffic, as in "That was a real waste of bandwidth."

BBS — Bulletin Board Service, a computer system that lets users post e-mail, upload or download files, and chat with other hackers (usually for a fee).

bogosity — The quality of being bogus, or something which is bogus. As in "You think Picard makes a better Starfleet commander than Kirk??? Such bogosity!"

C — A programming language developed at Bell Labs for use on UNIX systems; it is to MS DOS as a Ferrari Testarossa is to a Ford Escort.

C programmer — One who programs in C language; a brainiac.

cyberspace — Term coined by novelist William Gibson to describe the area of interaction between a virtual-reality system and a hacker's brain. Not currently accessible on the net.

e-mail — Electronic mail. As opposed to snail-mail, which is delivered by the U.S. Postal Service.

FAQ — A Frequently Asked Questions list, the document most Usenet newsgroups maintain to keep newbies from wasting bandwidth with stuff everyone else already knows.

flame — A hostile response to another user's stupid posting; to make such a response.

flame war — What you get when one flame begets another. At their worst, flame wars have been known to take over entire newsgroups.

flamage — What those newsgroup readers not involved in a flame war end up wading through.

FTP — File Transfer Protocol; that is, the system for transferring files across the net. Hence, an FTP site is a net address that contains files for transfer.

g — Grin or giggle. See also "smiley."

.gif — For graphic interchange format. A type of file allowing one user to upload a scanned image — usually a photo — so others may download and view it.

guru — An especially skilled and knowledgeable hacker.

hacker — One who hacks — that is, an avid user of computers. Refers most generally to any traveler on the net. Not to be confused with cracker, or one who breaks into systems in order to play pranks.

Internet — A worldwide network linking computers belonging to various individual entities. Strictly speaking, the Internet is for university and research purposes; its business equivalent is the Alternet. Usenet is the recreational end of the net, and is full of specialty newsgroups like comp.lang.c, rec.arts.comics, and alt.sex.fetish.diapers.

IMHO — In My Humble Opinion.

IMHO WIVH — In My Humble Opinion, Which Is Very Humble.

IRC — Internet Relay Chat. This is the net's "party room," a forum that allows real-time conversation with a variety of users. This is probably what Mike Doonesbury was logged onto when he was flirting with "Dancer."

.jpg — Pronounced "jay-peg," from joint photographic experts group. A type of file allowing one user to upload a scanned image — usually a photo — so others may download and view it.

KIBO — Central deity in the parody religion Kibology, created by net prankster James Parry, who goes by the username KIBO. Believed to stem from acronym of "Knowledge In, Bull Out."

line noise — Electronic transmission interference, resulting in garbage characters.

lurker — A regular newsgroup reader who never posts; one who experiences the net vicariously.

MEGO — My Eyes Glaze Over.

net — A network. Usually refers to Internet or Usenet.

netiquette — Proper behavior on the net.

net.personality — One who posts regularly or extravagantly enough to become famous within a newsgroup or newsgroups.

newbie — One new to the net. As in, "Read the FAQ, newbie!"

newsgroup — Any Usenet topic group, usually designated by discussion type (e.g. "comp." for computer-interest groups, "rec." for recreational groups, etc). Among the better-known newsgroups are alt.sex, misc.jobs.offered, comp.unix.wizards and rec.arts.sf-lovers.

phreaking — Phone freaking; that is, using a computer to crack telephone long-distance codes and the like. Needless to say, a highly illegal pursuit.

ROTFLOL — Rolling On The Floor, Laughing Out Loud; that is, "That was very funny."

.sig file — An elaborate signature, usually involving a quote or ASCII illustration, that is automatically appended to a user's posting.

smileys — Any face-like illustration made with ASCII characters used to convey emotion or satirical intent. For example, :) or :-) means "I'm happy" (lean your head to the left, and it looks like a smiley face), while ;) or ;-) means "I'm kidding." Use of noses optional.

STTNG Star Trek: The Next Generation.

sysop — System operator; the programmer in charge of a bulletin board.

UNIX — A multitasking operating system invented at Bell Labs and widely used on mainframes. Believed by some programmers to be the only operating system worth using.

'Parent' aircraft lead flock on a wild goose chase

By D'VERA COHN
THE WASHINGTON POST

Eighteen tired and honking geese, led by two ultralight aircraft they believed were their parents, touched down late last month on a Fauquier County, Va., field, after a seven-day journey from Canada.

The extraordinary sunset landing capped what is believed to be the first successful attempt to have birds learn their migration route from an aircraft. The experiment will be considered successful if the birds return here next fall, organizers said. The project also is expected to yield insights into goose behavior and endurance in flight, as well as communication among geese.

The geese and the metal-and-fabric aircraft — whose yellow bodies and batlike wings gave them a birdlike appearance — circled the airstrip at the Airlie Conference Center near Warrenton, an hour's drive from Washington, several times so the birds could have a good look at the terrain.

Canadian artist and pilot William Lishman, one of the experiment's organizers, landed his aircraft first. He climbed out, then looked up and made a few honking noises to coax down the geese.

In the other aircraft, pilot Joe Duff flew with the geese in tighter and tighter circles until the lead goose landed, to the applause of two dozen spectators.

The rest of the flock circled twice more and touched down, calling to each other as they did. Duff then brought his plane in.

The geese and pilots flew at speeds up to 50 mph and at altitudes up to 3,700 feet.

On the last day of the trip, the birds flew for 4½ hours, one of their longest days. In all, they flew four days and rested three, during bad weather.

If the experiment works on common geese, Sladen said, it eventually could be used to restore rare or endangered birds such as trumpeter swans and whooping cranes to areas where they once lived. The technique also could be used to lead away nuisance birds, including year-round flocks of geese on golf courses or suburban ponds.

Earthweek: a diary of the planet *By Steve Newman*

Rising Threat

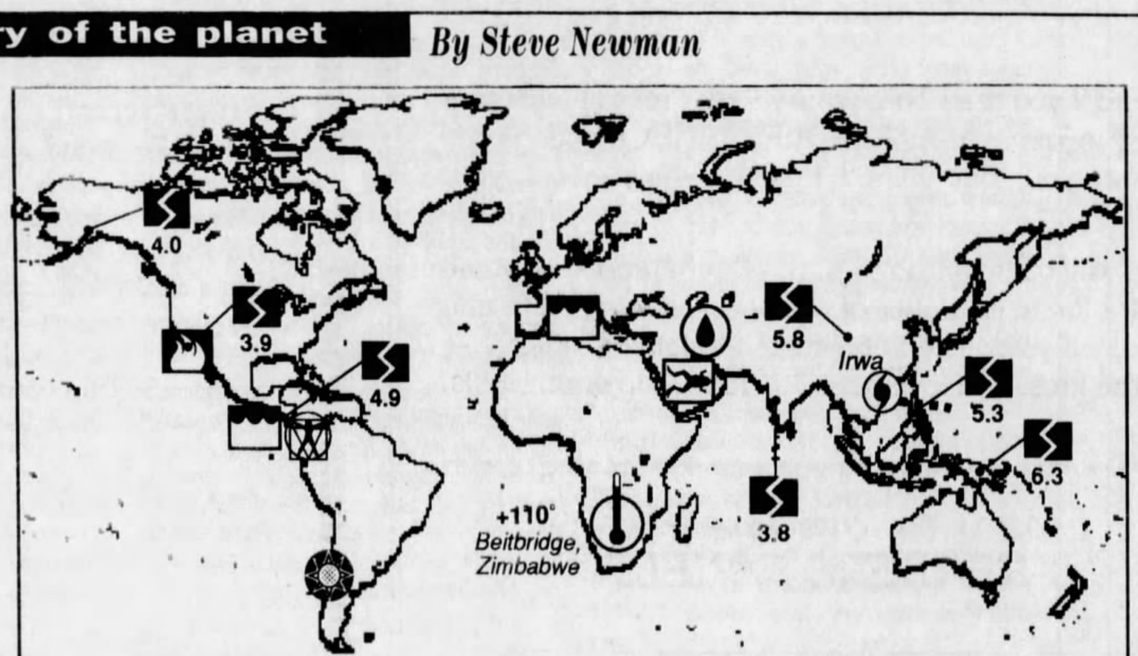
Steadily rising water levels in the Caspian Sea since the early 1980s have swamped almost 3,000 homes and claimed 80,000 acres of farmland in northern Iran. A Mazandaran provincial official said that heavy rainfalls, overflowing rivers, and the encroaching sea have inflicted heavy damage to roads, bridges, farms, and houses. When the water started rising 20 years ago, it caused little concern, but now 18 coastal cities from Ramsar in the west to Banaaan in the east are threatened with gradual coastal erosion. It is estimated that water levels have a 60-year cycle of rise and fall on the Caspian Sea, the world's largest lake.

Tropical Storms

Torrential rains from typhoon Irwa unleashed avalanches of volcanic debris down the slopes of Mount Pinatubo as the storm swept across Luzon. After passing across the South China Sea, Irwa brought heavy seas and high winds to China's Guangdong coast. Gusty winds and heavy rain on the edge of the storm contributed to the ditching of a Taiwanese 747 jetliner into Hong Kong Harbor as the plane was attempting to land at the Crown Colony's airport.

World Health

An outbreak of mosquito-borne dengue fever has spread from the Costa Rican countryside into the capital. Health ministry official Ana Gabriela Ross announced that three cases of dengue had been reported in the poor and crowded neighborhood of Pavas in San Jose. The government warned people to fumigate porches and patios, and eliminate standing water which may serve as a breeding ground for the Aedes aegypti mosquitoes that carry dengue.



UV Alert

Ultraviolet radiation rose by 30 percent during the last few days of October along the central coast of Chile. Researchers at Santa Maria University in Santiago said that the jump in UV readings is due to the record depletion of stratospheric ozone this season over the higher latitudes of the southern hemisphere. According to World Health Organization studies, increased exposure to ultraviolet radiation can cause cataracts and skin cancer, and weaken the body's immune system.

Earthquakes

Strong quakes rocked the capital cities of Nicaragua and the Philippines but there were no reports of damage.

Earth movements were also felt in southwestern India, Papua New Guinea, south-central Alaska, China's Qinghai province, and parts of Southern California.

Wildfires

For a second consecutive week, parts of California were devastated by wildfires fanned by strong desert winds blowing into coastal areas. More than 200 homes were destroyed in this second round of wildfires, including many owned by show business celebrities. Emergency management officials were forced to dispatch a Coast Guard cutter to the beaches of Malibu to rescue people trapped by fires that had spread from fashionable nearby mountain and canyon areas to the famed Pacific shoreline.

Floods

More than 15,000 people were forced from their homes by heavy flooding in Honduras and parts of neighboring Nicaragua. Officials said that at least 110 people died during the inundations which caused rivers to surge out of their banks. Mud slides cut off villages along Honduras's main Atlantic coastal highway.

Flash flooding on the Mediterranean island of Corsica swept four people to their deaths and destroyed a dozen bridges.

Frog Jam

A three-mile-long segment of highway in western Iran's Hamadan province was blocked by millions of frogs which may have been flushed out of their usual breeding grounds by several days of heavy rains. However, some unconventional Iranian researchers have speculated that major changes in the earth's strata and faults may have increased underground temperatures, making some subterranean habitats of the frogs too warm for the amphibians' comfort.

Additional Sources: *U.S. Climate Analysis Center, U.S. Earthquake Information Center, British Broadcasting Corporation, and the World Meteorological Organization.*